

May 14, 2008: Sanchez Urges Vietnam to Cease Harassment and Prosecution Against Democracy Activists

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Sanchez Urges Vietnam to Cease Harassment and Prosecution Against Peaceful Democracy Activists After Release of Imprisoned U.S. Citizen

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Today Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez, Co-chair of the Congressional Caucus on Vietnam, issued the following statement at a hearing on "Human Rights Conditions in Vietnam and Suggestions for the U.S.-Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue".

Statement as prepared.

The Honorable Loretta Sanchez

Congressional Caucus on Vietnam

Hearing on "Human Rights Conditions in Vietnam and Suggestions for the U.S.-Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue"

May 14, 2008

Good Afternoon.

Thank you all for being here today to examine the important issue of human rights conditions in Vietnam.

I would like to particularly thank our witnesses for providing their insight and expert knowledge on these issues to Congress.

In addition I would like to thank my co-chairs on the Congressional Caucus on Vietnam, Congresswoman Lofgren, Congressman Smith, and Congressman Davis.

I'm very proud that we continue to work together to call attention to the human rights abuses in Vietnam.

I have the privilege of representing the Vietnamese community in Orange County- one of the largest outside of Vietnam.

Human rights is an important issue to me and my Vietnamese constituents.

And as we all know, egregious human rights abuses continue to be the norm in Vietnam.

Just this week, three peaceful democracy activists-including American citizen Dr. Nguyen Quoc Quan-were tried on charges of "terrorism" in Vietnam after being held for 6 months because they had leaflets about democracy.

I am pleased that Dr. Quan will soon be home in the United States with his family, but I am also outraged that the Vietnamese government continues to falsely accuse and harass peaceful democracy activists and Vietnamese Americans.

Dr. Quan is the sixth US citizen to be harassed and detained by Vietnamese authorities.

This is unacceptable.

Human rights violations in Vietnam have only gotten worse since Vietnam was:

- granted Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) status,
- removed from the State Department's list of Countries of Particular Concern,
- added to the World Trade Organization (WTO), and
- allowed to be a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.

In my eyes, these policies-which have been endorsed by the Bush Administration-have been unjustified rewards for the Government of Vietnam even though no real effort has been made to improve its human rights record.

The Government of Vietnam claimed that it had improved its human rights record, and that it would continue to make progress on the issue of human rights.

But Vietnam's long pattern of arresting peaceful activists, ignoring human trafficking, and other abuses speaks for itself.

Vietnam has gone against international covenants of human rights, charging innocent non-violent democracy activists as terrorists.

That is why I have introduced a house resolution that calls for the Secretary of State to establish a Countries of Particular Concern list which would incorporate nations like Vietnam who engage in gross human rights violations.

We need to add Vietnam to that list.

Human rights abuses in Vietnam continue to be a major problem and we must continue to work together to affect change.

I am very thankful to all the advocates that have worked so hard to ensure the safe release of arrested democracy activists.

I know that my colleagues and I in Congress will continue to advocate for freedom and justice in Vietnam.

I look forward to gaining additional insight from this hearing and to continuing our work together to promote human rights in Vietnam.

Thank You.

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